

## SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN MODERN WOMEN IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S *THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT*

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### ABSTRACT

*The early Indian women novelists have been portraying women as a silent sufferer, who carries traditional values and ethics, tolerance and patience, a woman without an identity no freedom and so on. The quest for identity is an important search that each human being feels at a certain stage of life. Githa Hariharan examines the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian women. The Thousand Faces of Night, is a novel of three women Sita, Devi and Mayamma they represent three different generations and more than thousand faces of women in India who still have no better existence than night. Mayamma is the old house -keeper in Mahesh's house. Her pathetic story states the situation most of the women in India. She had to face domestic violence from her husband and mother-in-law. She is directly humiliated mentally and abused physically. Sita led her life with grim determination, choice and sacrifice to become a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. Devi, being the representative of the new generation of self actualizing women, seeks a new way to her problem. She has a balanced and practical approach to her problems. She realises that victory does not lie in the subjugation and destruction of the male, but it lies in bringing him to see the indispensability of each other's space. The proposed study attempts to moves on to cursive at varying levels of intellectual self actualization which enable the characters to either attain liberation or reconciliation through self- knowledge.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Silently Suffering, Identity, Realizes & Existential Crisis, etc.,*

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### INTRODUCTION

Githa Hariharan's first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), highlights the survival strategies of women belonging to three different generations. The novel has won the Commonwealth Prize for First Best Book. The protagonist of the novel, Devi, being the youngest of the three, is US returned modern woman who ends up in a bitter marriage. Another powerful character in the novel is her mother Sita, who strives for self assertion by aspiring to bridge the widening gap between tradition and modernity. Mayamma, being the last, is the old family retainer in Devi's husband's house, and is a real typical instance for women's exploitation by patriarchal society. Githa Hariharan agrees completely with feminist ideologies and supports and suggests a changed system where women have greater control of their lives. *An Existential Crisis* is representing self actualization as an identity.

Githa Hariharan provides the reader with an insight to probe into a social condition. The pathetic story of Mayamma states the situation of women in India. No one feels it necessary to think about her honour because she is a woman. There is no place for a woman in the male dominated society. The honour of a woman is an unacceptable term. Her honour is only concerned with the honour of man. She has no individual identity. She is a typical Indian female character who lived in her fate and cursed it but never questioned it. Her story clearly shows us women who marry early are more likely to suffer abuse and violence, with inevitable psychological as well as

physical consequences. Her mother-in-law was truly concerned about the jewellery she was wearing. Mayamma's mother-in-law's attitude was devilish as she used to feed previous day's rice considering it useless to feed fresh juice to a barren woman and she never allowed her to wear a sari according to her wish. All her wishes crushed under mother-in-law's feet. Years passed and she could not conceive. Her mother-in-law compels her to follow strictly certain religious ceremonies and practices in the hope of getting a grandchild. Mayamma quietly did all that was expected of her. Her husband who was a part and parcel of her was a mute spectator to all that was happening in her life. Mayamma, after ten long years of penance, is blessed with a son born on Diwali, a day with lights and fire crackers. Now, her husband in his middle age, indulges himself in too much drinking and gambling beyond limits of reasonable behaviour. Once Mayamma's husband steel all the money in the house and is out of sight, at home.

Sita, mother of Devi, a middle-aged woman, represents a life between the two extreme generations of Mayamma and Devi. Sita is a cool confident middle aged woman. Sita is a woman who always knew what she wanted and got it. After her marriage with Mahadevan, Sita takes her Veena to her mother-in-law's house as "she had inherited it as part of the dowry". She used to play the Veena only after she finished her household duties. But she gives up playing Veena, her first love. Veena for which she had been accepted as a bride, became her crime. She practiced for atleast five or six hours every day. Sita is admonished by her father-in-law for playing Veena. To his remark, "Put that Veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?" ,Sita's whispered response is a mere "Yes. I am wife and a daughter-in-law." And she pulls the Veena strings out of the wooden base never to touch the instrument again. This incident also shows how women like Sita cannot even take the help of language to defend them. One location for patriarchal power is language and the public platforms where language is used most prestigiously. This terrible reaction represents psychological behaviour of inner mind, because, this punishment not only fuelled her own anger but it was an ever present reproach to those who had wronged her. This is also a kind of silent revenge. Sita's behaviour and attitude were greatly appreciated by her husband Mahadevan. When they left the village because of Mahadevan's job, he had deliberately handed over the authority of taking decisions of their lives and household in the hands of Sita. Meanwhile she lost her husband, after that she takes care her daughter as a single parent. Sita too is reborn at the end of the novel through her daughter's adventures in life and she retrieves her lost self by returning to her music, to her veena. She thus realizes that woman is not primarily a wife or a mother but an individual with her own work and world cut out of her.

Devi, the protagonist here, a plain looking young woman educated in the United States returns to India at the behest of her mother; gets married to a diligent and serious minded business executive Mahesh; soon finds marriage a sort of solitary confinement, suffers a growing sense of futility and seeks escape in the company of a musical celebrity Gopal. This particular decision of Devi to elope with Gopal shows the psychology of Krishna being referred to as a lover of women. The name Gopal may be understood as a generic name to mean "Lord Krishna". Devi accompanied Gopal to many concerts and was hypnotized into forgetfulness. But she finds her life with Gopal like that of a kite. She finds this unpleasing and unwanted. She locates herself in her isolated corner. There is not much difference between Mahesh and Gopal who both fail to perceive her emotions and soul.

Githa Hariharan has skilfully drawn the neurotic self of Devi in the showdown, battling with the pangs of alienation and emancipation through mythological stories. Human beings are unaware of our real situation and just carry on struggling, trying to achieving or being frustrated within the constricted pattern of a society. But Devi is confident of her capabilities to make choices and assumes control over her life. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the

independent spirit displayed by her prove that she has reached a stage of self actualization. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure. Thus, Hariharan is optimistic that such tyranny will soon have its end, and women's space and potential will be recognized and they will become empowered.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this novel, various aspects and various dimensions of familial relationships that are discussed help to get a clear idea about the role of a person in a family. There are mother-daughter, mother-son and relationship with in-laws, but the much focused one is husband- wife relationship which is the foundation and base of a family from where many new relationships start taking shape and develop. *Superior awareness of Devi's quest is to regain her lost identity and to be truthful to her desires by gaining a control over her true 'self'*. Self-actualization is not just about knowing and fulfilling one's purpose in life. Knowing that you have fulfilled a purpose in life is what creates us to feel worthy, happy and content with our own life.

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